



Dear Distinguished Veterans,

From Bunker Hill to Baghdad, our veterans have selflessly stood in harm's way as the guardians of our most fundamental freedoms.

One of our nation's great strengths is the unselfish courage of the citizen who steps forward, puts on the uniform and stands ready to face danger. It is that quality, more than any other, which has kept us free for more than 200 years.

But it isn't just Americans who owe those in uniform a great debt. Indeed, it is the world that owes this debt. Americans have brought hope and left graves in every corner of the world. They have spilled their blood in many foreign lands, never for conquest, but for freedom and liberty.

During World War II, more than 16 million of these citizen soldiers stepped forward to defend the lamp of liberty in foreign lands darkened by fascism and hate. This year, we commemorated the 60th anniversary of the end of this world war – a war in which more than 400,000 Americans gave their lives and hundreds of thousands more were gravely injured.

Today in Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans have liberated millions of people who had never tasted freedom before.

"I have seen American soldiers bring hope and leave graves in every corner of the world."
-US Senator Bob Dole

From providing medical care and rebuilding schools, or standing guard so that Iraqis can vote on their new constitution, our troops are making a real difference in these once oppressed countries.

Today, there are 25 million living American veterans and more than 3 million men and women currently serving in uniform. We owe each one a great debt of gratitude. We have asked them to defend our nation and we need to let them know each and every day that they are not forgotten.

With warmest regards,

Congressman Gutknecht honors the Gold Star Mothers at a Capitol Hill press conference.



The American Gold Star Mothers is an organization that no one wants to join. The initiation begins with a knock on the door and two military personnel bearing sad news. Unfortunately, many of us have forgotten that Gold Star Mothers have a special day. It is the last Sunday of September. This year, Gold Star Mothers Day was celebrated on September 25.

Thanks to various veterans' groups, Congress paused to recognize Gold Star Mothers' Day earlier that week. I was gratified by the unanimous support I received from my colleagues on this measure.



CONGRESSMAN GIL GUTKNECHT

425 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-2472

1530 Greenview Drive SW, Suite 108
Rochester, MN 55902
800-862-8632 or 507-252-9841

109 East 2nd Street
Fairmont, MN 55031
507-238-2835

www.gil.house.gov
gil@mail.house.gov



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HONORING
OUR NATION'S
VETERANS

Congressman Gil Gutknecht
First District, Minnesota

On July 21, 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed an order that consolidated various veterans' programs. Since then, the modern Department of Veterans Affairs has grown from an organization of 48 hospitals and 30,000 employees into the nation's second-largest federal agency.

This year, the Veterans Administration celebrates its 75th anniversary. In honor of this momentous occasion, I invite you to take a look at the VA, "Then and Now":



Congressman Gutknecht talks to a veteran about VA services at an event hosted by The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA).

	Then (1930)	Now (2004)
America's population of living veterans:	4.6 million	24.8 million
VA Budget:	\$786 million	\$63.5 billion
VA Personnel:	31,500	235,978
Number of VA Hospitals:	54	157
VA Medical budget:	\$30 million	\$29.1 billion
Veterans hospitalized at VA facilities:	54,000	587,000
Visits by veterans for outpatient clinic care:	800,000	54 million
Number of VA Regional Offices:	54	57
Number of veterans or dependents receiving VA compensation or pension benefits:	900,000	3.4 million
Amount of compensation or pension benefits paid:	\$418 million	\$27.6 billion
Number of VA life insurance policies:	646,000	7.7 million
Face value of life insurance policies:	\$3.3 billion	\$757 billion

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan."
-VA motto

Taking Care of Our Veterans

I know how important federal benefits are to our nation's veterans and their families. That is why I am so proud of the work Republicans have done to improve veterans' benefits:

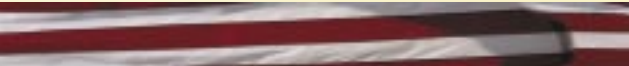
In just the last four years, we have:

- Increased the VA budget from \$48 billion in FY 2001 to \$68 billion in FY 2005 – a 42 percent increase;
- Increased the medical care funding for veterans from \$21.7 billion in FY 2001 to \$29.9 billion in FY 2005 – a 38 percent increase. As a result, a record number of veterans are receiving health care benefits today – 1 million more than four years ago;
- Passed a historic concurrent receipt benefit for veterans that will provide more than \$22 billion to more than 250,000 disabled military retirees over the next 10 years;
- Doubled the monthly education benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill from \$405 to \$985. Also increased lifetime benefits from \$23,400 to \$35,460;
- Improved the VA Home Loan program by increasing the maximum home loan guarantee to \$333,700 – an increase of 67 percent;
- Expanded the national cemetery system – the largest expansion since the Civil War. Six new cemeteries will be established in southeastern Pennsylvania; Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Bakersfield, California; Greenville, South Carolina; and Sarasota, Florida.

Since 2001, Congress also has passed, and President Bush has signed into law, 17 separate bills that will expand veterans' benefits and services.

These new laws will:

- Expand the scope and quality of veterans' health care services;
- Improve job training and placement services for veterans;
- Clarify and strengthen employment and reemployment rights for veterans;
- Extend new benefits to veterans' widows and dependents;
- Help eradicate homelessness among veterans;
- Strengthen the legal rights of all service members.



Top: Congressman Gutknecht discusses the war in Iraq with returning members of Rochester's 79th military police unit. Bottom: Congressman Gutknecht views new wheelchairs delivered to the Minnesota Veterans Home in Luverne by inventor Jerry Ford. Photo courtesy Worthington Daily Globe.

